

THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN THE FAR EAST.

JAPANESE SUCCESSES from 1937 to 1942.

Japan's generals had decided to solve the problems of the Depression of the 1930s in Japan by seizing an empire. They started in 1931 by invading Manchuria. In 1936, Japan joined Germany and Italy in the Anti-Comintern Pact: an alliance of the three military dictatorships against Communism. In 1937 Japan invaded China.

The British, French and Dutch empires in the Far East could not be defended while their European homelands were under attack. The Japanese wanted to free the people of Asia from white colonial rule. But what they really had eyes on were the food and raw materials which Asia could produce to boost Japanese industry. After France was defeated the Japanese occupied Indo-China in 1941. The whole of the Far East seemed to be open to them, and only two countries could stop them: the USSR and the USA. By June 1941, the USSR was fighting for its life against the German invaders; only the USA was left.

Pearl Harbour.

In mid-1941, President Roosevelt imposed a ban on all trade with Japan in iron, steel and oil, and froze all Japanese money in the USA. The military leaders in Japan planned a secret and surprise attack to knock out the US Pacific Fleet. They calculated that this would gain them a two-year period of supremacy at sea, during which they could seize all the territory they wanted in the Far East.

Late in 1941, the Japanese Admiral Yamamoto led his aircraft carriers, secretly, across the Pacific until he was about 480 km north of Pearl Harbour. Spies had supplied the Japanese with details of the great US naval base. From Yamamoto's carriers 360 Japanese bombers took off and flew to Pearl Harbour in two waves early on the Sunday morning of 7 December. The US fleet was caught completely unprepared. President Roosevelt called the attack "a day of infamy". American isolation ended.

Japanese advances.

They took the US bases of Guam and Wake Island in the Pacific. They captured Hong Kong from the British and moved into Malaya. Three days after Pearl Harbour, a similar air attack sank two warships of the Royal Navy. The Dutch East Indies and the Philippines were invaded early in 1942. The big British base at Singapore was heavily defended against attack. The Japanese attacked Singapore, crossing from Malaya, and in February 1942, the British surrendered.

JAPAN from 1942 to 1944.

To control the sea it was now necessary to control the air. A naval war could now be fought from aircraft carriers, protected by other warships.

The Battle of the Coral Sea.

In May 1942 the Japanese fleet met the US Pacific fleet in the Battle of the Coral Sea. The Japanese lost two carriers to America's one. The Japanese failed to capture the rest of New Guinea, from which they could have attacked Australia.

The Battle of Midway.

The next month a Japanese attack was launched on the US held island of Midway. By now the US had broken the Japanese radio code, so the Japanese had no surprise advantage. At the Battle of Midway in June 1942 four Japanese carriers were sunk.

Allied counter-attack.

The counter-attack on the Japanese positions was three-pronged. US Admiral led the seaborne attack westwards across the Pacific. By mid-1944, he had retaken the important base of Guam.

In the south—west Pacific, General MacArthur began to fight his way north-westwards towards the Philippines. By leapfrogging to important bases, he cut Japanese supply lines.

Meanwhile, the third line of attack on the Japanese was launched by the British in Burma. The Japanese believed that surrender was shameful and that it was much better to die fighting or even to commit suicide than to be taken by the enemy.

JAPAN of 1944 and 1945.

By 1944, American superiority was beginning to become obvious. Even though the major US effort went into the war in Europe, Japanese tactics had clearly failed.

Battle of Leyte Gulf.

In October 1944, MacArthur invaded the Philippines. The Japanese threw what was left of their army into an attack on the invasion fleet in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. The Japanese lost. On land, Japanese soldiers died trying to prevent the American advance on Manila, the capital of the Philippines.

Kamikaze pilots.

At this stage the Japanese began to send Kamikaze pilots against the American fleet. Kamikaze means 'Divine Wind', and pilots would deliberately crash their planes loaded with explosives on to an American battleship.

Japanese defeats.

In 1944, the Japanese had invaded India. The invasion was stopped by General Slim at Imphal.

The British pressed on into Burma, driving the Japanese back. Soon, the 'Burma Road' was open, the only land route to China. Up to this time the Chinese had been supplied by air-lift over the Himalayas.

Now US aid could reach China by land. The Chinese leader showed little inclination to fight the Japanese. If Japan were to be finally defeated, it would have to be by the USA. Attacks against two islands which could be used as bases for air-raids on Japan itself.

In February 1945, Iwo Jima was taken and in April, Okinawa.

The END of The WAR in 1945.

The Americans were now able to bomb Japanese cities at will. The US navy was by now able to prevent supplies getting through to Japan, and there was widespread hunger throughout the country.

The Atomic Bomb.

By mid-1945, President Truman took the decision of ending the war rapidly using the atomic bomb. The work on an atomic bomb had been going on since 1942, it was called the Manhattan Project. On 16 July 1945 an atomic bomb was successfully tested at Los Alamos in the Nevada Desert.

Potsdam.

At the Potsdam meeting in July 1945, Truman, Attlee (who had succeeded Churchill) and Stalin agreed that the USSR would join in the war in the east within a month. The Allies also announced that the atom bomb would be dropped on Japan if it didn't surrender.

On 6 August, Colonel Tibbetts piloted his bomber, the 'Enola Gay', to Hiroshima and dropped a single atomic bomb. On 8 August, the USSR declared war on Japan. On 9 August, a second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. The Japanese surrendered on 14 August.

President Truman has been heavily criticised for his decision to drop the atom bombs. His main reason for ordering them to be dropped was that he wanted the war to be finished quickly, without further loss of American lives. It had been suggested that a quick end for the war prevented the USSR, whom the USA was beginning to see as a rival, from taking any territory in the East.

The war in the East was over in 1945, but its effects were long lasting. The attack on Pearl Harbour ended the isolationist policy of the USA forever.